

Field Naturalists' Club of Ballarat Inc

March 1999

CATFISH



WANTED
DEAD

*Picture drawn by Andrew Coad (age 9), a Land for
Wildlifer from Brim, Copied from "Land For
Wildlife News", Jan '99.*

*Andrew is obviously aware of damage they can
cause by disturbing aquatic vegetation and causing
increased turbidity due to their feeding techniques.*

Meetings are held at the Ballarat Horticulture centre, corner of Gregory and Gillies Streets, ie. the NW corner of the Botanic Gardens, commencing at 7-30pm

Excursions depart from Creswick Plaza at 9-30 am, unless specified otherwise.

Committee; Claire Dalman (President).. , Greg Binns (Vice President).. , Pat Murphy (Secretary).. , John Gregurke (Treasurer).. , Brian Andrews (Editor).. , Helen Burgess, Lyndsay Fink, Brian Gavin, Carol Hall, Margaret Rotheran.

Postal Address: PO Box 328W, Ballarat West, 3350

Inc Reg No A0014919P

DIARY DATES

Fri 12th Mar. Meeting. *AGM and Members' Night; short presentations by members of the club. Theme: Inland Waters.*

Sun 14th Mar. Excursion. *Central Highlands Water Reservoirs - a selection of venues:- . Leader Greg Binns. Club member.*

Sun 21st Mar. Landfest.

Tues 30th Mar. Committee Meeting. *The Andrews' place. , 7-30pm.*

Fri 9th April. Meeting. *The Wondrous North West and a handful of finches. Speaker Greg Binns, club member.*

Sun 11th April. Excursion. *The Organ Pipes N.P. Leader Lyndsay Fink, club member.*

Fri 30th April. Meeting, Maryborough FNC, clubroom. *Birds of Prey. Speaker Richard Naisbitt. Cost \$2.50 or \$5.00/family. A special invitation to FNCB members to attend.*

FIELD REPORTS

Latham's snipe, 5, Yolinko Wetland (Geelong), 19th Jan.

Sidimella trapezia, (I call them tawny crab spiders), plentiful at Durham Lead.

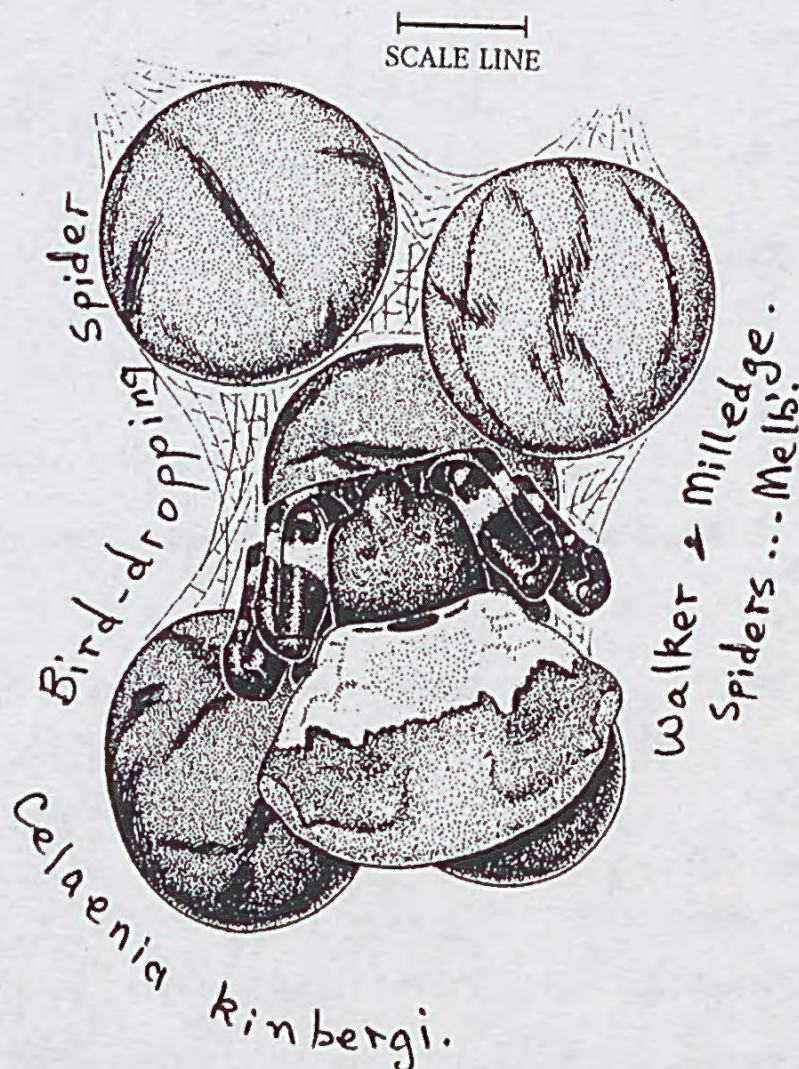
Hawkmoth, feeding from callistemons, hovering like a humming-bird. Feeding disrupted by floodlight.

11pm, 24th Dec. Copper-head snake, killed on our drive, by our border collie - much to the amazement of an English visitor that was staying at our place! Brian Andrews.

Rufous whistler, Creswick Koala Park. Yellow tailed black cockatoos, 3 at Long

Point Flora Reserve, mid December, Carol Hall. White-plumed honeyeater, Village car

pl



park, 5th Feb, 6 galahs on parkland, Eustace St. Bird dropping spider, on rosebush with 9 eggsacs. observed spiderlings emerging from two egg sacs, Ken Hammond. Blue-banded native bees feeding on lavender bush, Les Hanrahan. Mass flowering of stringybarks, Mt Helen, and for the first time in 24 years, presence of large numbers of lorikeets - little and purple crowned identified, John Mildren. FNCV excursion in November:- Gannets nesting at Pope's Eye. Dolphins leading a container ship. Seals on the old South Channel Light piles. Silver gulls, caspian and crested terns, straw necked ibis and pelicans - nesting in their thousands on Mud Island. Chris Baulch. Skenes Creek / Apollo Bay area Jan 29-30, king parrots, and on the beach -pacific gulls, silver gulls and crested terns. Greg Binns. Nautilus in shallows, with eggs, Ken McDonnell.

MARINE LIFE IN PORT PHILLIP BAY

Environmental consultants Clarrie Handreck, Harry Houridis and Luke Kiolair from the Marine Science & Ecology Group spoke to us at our February meeting.

They started by telling us about various introduced species which are causing concern. 172 introduced marine species have been identified in Australia, 145 of those are found in PPB. The ones causing most concern are the following:- North Pacific Sea Star, 5 arms, very pointed, yellow-purple in colour. They devastated the Derwent and were then found at a Dromana muscle farm. They apparently arrived in the 1980's. They eat everything - including dead dogs - and become cannibalistic if no other food is available. A single sea star can lay 10-20 million eggs a year and the larvae are viable for 2 months. There are no known predators in the southern hemisphere but a larger sea star eats them in the northern hemisphere. Japanese Kelp, found in 1996, abundant at Pt Wilson, rapid growth - a "typical weed". Sabellid Fan Worm, looks attractive but competes with native filter feeders. Ubiquitous, up to 100/m², no known predators but dieback has been noticed. European Shore Crab, now world wide, identified PPB 1900, aggressive and voracious feeder, competes with native crabs. Asian Muscle, related to our muscles but less than ¹/₃ normal size. Found in Corio Bay 1967, now abundant, up to 3000/m². Competes with natives. European Clam PPB only Aust' record. Abundant but being eaten by N.P. seastars! Green Sea Fingers, subspecies of our native, found near Jap' Kelp. Toxic Dinoflagellates, microscopic organisms. Four species identified, including *Alexandrium fundyense*, responsible for "red tides" - which were first noted in PPB in January 1988.

They produce neurotoxins which get into shellfish. Eating affected shellfish, such as muscles, can result in diarrhoea, paralysis and even death! Nowadays there is a testing authority which checks the safety of muscles before sale. The test is simple - samples are fed to mice - but you have to wait 4 days for the result. If you want to collect your own muscles, maybe you should be breeding up a few pet mice! Most of the foreign species probably arrived here in ship's ballast or hulls, but they could also have come in fishing nets, frozen bait, anchors, refuse etc.

We were then shown a variety of slides:- sea squirt, sea worms, sea cucumber, yellow sea spider on red coral, healthy sea grass and sea grass smothered in algae - caused by excessive nutrients - which can eventually kill the sea grass. A red sea urchin, sponges, anemones, zoanthids, a purple sea star with 6 arms, hydroids which looked like ferns, green stony coral, golden coral, a pregnant male seahorse etc. Claire praised the slides as being beautiful but excused herself from any diving because she was "too old" - Harry quickly replied that most of the slides were taken by a lady who was over 70 years of age!

Finally we were shown a video of various underwater scenes :- Longsdale Wall, Pope's Eye, Pt Wilson, Crawfish Rock etc - each with their own different environments.

We were all so favourably impressed that we requested them to lead us on an excursion - which they agreed to do!

...Thanks fellas!BDA

BAY EXCURSION.....A GLORIOUS DAY

-thanks to excellent organiser Margaret Rotheram.

Sun, sea and sky
The best of company
knowledgeable, observant people
who were able to satisfy a continual curiosity

34 of us met at the Queenscliff Jetty, heavily disguised in hats, jackets, sun glasses and backpacks, full of expectation and ready for anything.

As the Ferry J.J. Farnsworth took off in the brisk south westerly swell, members settled down to enjoy themselves. There were short tailed shearwaters, soaring gannets, diving terns, even a black-faced cormorant was sighted. There was so much to see and experience. The huge blue sky, cumulous clouds, white tops and the sharp salty smell of the sea.

We passed several extensive buildings, of what was once, a Quarantine Station.

On the sandstone cliff face, there were good examples of cross bedding. (When sand is deposited in the sea by rivers or from currents in shallow water, gently sloping layers are built up. With changing conditions such as a storm, new sediments of different sizes are deposited at different angles. The pattern of layers exposed in the cliff is called cross -bedding or current bedding.) The hard rocks stick out as ledges, the softer ones had eroded away, undercut by the waves. Tree roots were exposed, clambering in search of nourishment. Thanks Carol.

Sorrento! Pelicans, Pacific Gulls and a hurried lunch by the sea. Then back to the pier to catch the Dolphin boat. (Owing to Saturday's high winds, Margaret R. was concerned that the boat owner thought it might be too rough to go to sea.) BUT ALL WAS WELL. We climbed aboard, cameras and binoculars at the ready.

So much sky and sea. The colour of turquoise in the shallows gradually changing from green to almost navy blue, as the depth of the sea increased. So much beauty, space and colour, I was reminded of John Mansefield's poem "Sea Fever" :-

"I must go down to the sea again
To the lonely sea and the sky
And all I ask is a tall ship
and a star to steer her by" etc..

"The seals are sighted", the words were passed along.

Anticipation grew. As we approached Chinaman's hat (minus the hat), an old warning beacon from the war years, there, lying prone on the derelict beacon, were more than 20 bull fur seals. (Fur seals were hunted and clubbed to death from the early 1800s. They became one of the first native animals in Australia to be legally protected. Fur seals catch fish. They also feed on squid, octopus and rock lobsters, but do not eat penguins. The fur seal has distinctive tiny ears and uses both pairs of flippers when "walking" on land ARE DARK BROWN TO BROWNISH GREY IN COLOUR WITH A DISTINCT "mane" of coarse hair.).

Thanks to Helen, delicious cake appeared at afternoon tea to honour birthday member, Margaret Rotheram. We sang "Happy Birthday" as she blew out her candle. President Claire thanked and praised Margaret for organising our special day.

As we drew close to the pier, there were many clinker built boats. Clinker boats were old barracouta fishing boats that used to fish outside the Heads. The new clinker boats are sailed for recreation. The boom is higher than usual to

provide working space.

Back to Sorrento. We now had some free time to wander, ponder, explore. Some members walked to Coppins Look Out at the back beach. We took a winding beach track with correa alba, polygala species, ruby salt bush growing in abundance. Kevin caught a blue tongue lizard and later noticed a stained glass window decorated with dolphins. Brian produced a wire leaf mistletoe for Pat to identify, *Amyema preissii*. Thank you Pat. We clambered aboard J.J. Farnsworth once more and headed for Queenscliff renewed in spirit and at peace after a marvellous day close to sun, sky and sea.

J.J.Farnsworth, the ferry was named after J.J.F. who was born in Portsea in 1902. J.J.'s great grandfather arrived in Portsea in 1840 and named the place.

Thank you to all those who contributed : Brian, Brian, Carol, Margaret, Helen, Greg, Pat, Rob.

Margaret Martin.

BOB'S CUTTINGS.

Bob has been working overtime! While on the Queenscliff excursion, he gave me enough cuttings to fill up 7 pages!

I've decided to summarise them for the newsletter, the original cuttings will be displayed at the meeting.

Regent's Return. Local children and landcare groups from Lurg Hills, near Benalla, are pleased because they have observed regent honeyeaters return to areas which they revegetated 5 years ago. Weekly Times. 16th Dec 1998.

New old whale theory. Paleontologists have found the fossilised jawbone and teeth of a new whale species *Himalayecetus subatuensis* which is about 53.5 million years old - 3.5 million years older than the fossilised whale specimen previously thought to be the oldest. Analysis of the oxygen isotopes found in the teeth also indicated that the first whales were amphibious. Herald Sun 25th Dec.

Suburban Platypuses. Members of the Urban Platypus Program, trapped and released 60 platypuses at 34 sites around Melbourne in 1997-98. Sites included Cockatoo Creek near Cockatoo, Olinda Creek at Lilydale, Jacksons Creek near Sunbury and Lang Lang River. One platypus travelled 40 km. Herald Sun 25/12/98



Regent
Honeyeater
by John has Gourgues
D.N.R.E.

Cancer hope under threat. The magnificent tree frog has been identified as having peptide secretions that inhibit the growth of cancers, golden staph and herpes. But a suffocating, fungal skin disease (Chytridiomycosis), discovered last year in the US has spread to Australia and threatens to wipe out entire species. It may be this disease which is causing the worldwide decline in frog species.

Little monster crayfish on the way. The giant Tasmanian crayfish at Bert Candusio's insectarium has mated and is carrying 200 eggs. The young could save the species from extinction. Herald Sun 23rd Dec.

Catnapping birds. New research by neurophysiologist Niles Rattenborg, in Nature magazine, has revealed birds can snooze with one eye open. By keeping half their brain awake, they can get a bit of shut-eye while watching for cats or other predators that get too close. Scientists have dubbed the phenomenon uni-hemispheric slow-wave sleep (USWS). Dolphins, seals and manatees also have USWS, which allows them to sleep and swim to the surface to breathe at the same time. USWS may also explain human sleepwalking.

Articles submitted by Bob Curtain

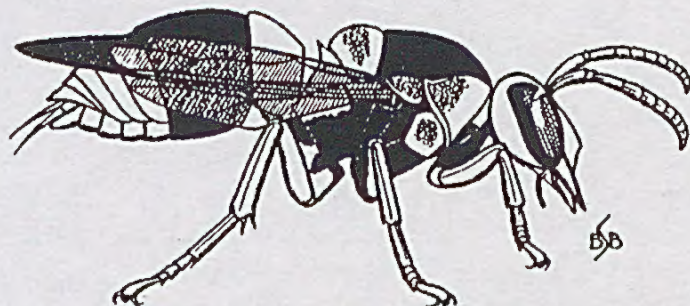
EXCURSION TO LAKE BURRUMBEET

The wind was blowing a gale and rain pelted down for almost two hours. The only sensible thing to do was to take refuge in the cars. Most members decided to go home, but those who decided to stay were rewarded with clearing clouds and finally sunshine. After our meal we wandered round the lake through she-oaks and banksias to the area that had been replanted with native trees, following the removal of pines.

We had fine close up views of a whistling kite. Hearing a whirring wings I looked down and was surprised to see a large black and orange striped wasp, presumably a mason wasp. Wandering back through the banksias I came to an abrupt halt when I realised I was about to walk into a strand of spider web which bridged a gap of 4m, a little searching revealed an orb web and a big fat garden spider.

A pleasant evening despite a rough start.

LARGE SOLITARY HUNTING WASP OR
MASON WASP
Monerebia ephippium



25mm or longer

From "The Silken Web"
by Bert Brunet.

ANSWERS TO THE FEBRUARY DOLPHIN QUIZ...FEB POSER

A1. Dolphins are born tail first, to reduce the risk of drowning. A2. Dolphins swallowed golf balls as a result of golfers on cruise liners whacking balls into oceans at a rate of half a million a month! The solution was to use nets to stop the balls going into the ocean. A3. Dolphins can sleep but remain conscious to breathe due to USWS (p6). A4. On average dolphins stay under for about 5 minutes at a time but they can stay under for as long as 15 minutes. A5. Dolphins can dive to a depth of 600m. A6. Dolphins can hear sounds up to 150kHz (150,000 vibrations per second). A7. We had Buckley's chance of seeing a porpoise! Porpoises have different beaks, teeth and habitat to dolphins, and never venture further south than Japan. A8. The Dolphin Research Institute studies dolphins in the bay. You can adopt a dolphin for \$49 for one year (tax deductible). DRI, PO Box 1245, Frankston, 3199. Further info' ph9783 7466. Facts taken from an article by Graeme Hammond, Sunday Herald Sun, Jan 17th.

WEBWATCH



If you're hitting websites you may like to try the following :-

DNRE <http://www.nre.vic.gov.au/>

Bird Atlas Project (RAOU)

<http://www.vicnet.net.au/~birdsaus/atlas>

Fungimap - ready for our July excursion!

<http://calcite.apana.org.au/fungimap>.

You can get on the internet for free at our friendly library.

If you don't know what I'm talking about, I would like to recommend the "Understanding the Internet" course at The Ballarat East Community House, ph5331 4107, 6 x 2.5hrs for \$40.

BDA

MARCH POSERS

Quite a few problems have cropped up this month to keep our minds occupied :-

1. Can you find some more good websites?

2. Why are there so few wasps this year?

3. What can be done about the carp in Lake Wendouree?

4. Lyndsay queried why there are no lyrebirds in the Otways.

He suggested that it may be due to the lack of sassafras. What do you think?

ERRATUM. Sept 98, p4, Brian Gavan did not supervise prisoners on work release or work for the dole participants.

BDA